

MARCH 31, 1983

Business is way off in Mertzon. Like all the various stations in the Shortgrass Country, the oil glut and the oil gluttons like OPEC have turned what was a flourishing boom into a tarnished bust. Where once the town overflowed with busy hardhatted hands and eager landmen, things are returning to a much quieter tempo.

In a way it's a relief for me. I missed out on the big windfall of \$40 oil and \$5 gas. It's hard to understand how. The ranch and myself were situated in the center of a frantic exploration program. I suppose you'd say we were the calm in the eye of the hurricane. We got the dust from the pipeline trucks without sharing in their cargo. It looks like, with so much money being made, we'd have got some of the action, but we didn't.

The thing I regret was failing to act on my ideas to exploit the big boom. Every working day the oil companies were cutting paraffin from their tubing and flow lines. It was all over before I thought of putting in a wax museum. Conditions were optimum. The town was full of characters and the countryside abounded in free wax.

Tourists go for wax museums in a big way. Out in New Mexico there must be 400 dozen reproductions of Billy the Kid. I know I've seen enough of his sixshooters to rearm half of the hoodlums in Chicago. Mertzon didn't have anyone to compare to Billy the Kid, but during our boom we had some guys around that should be remembered some way other than by a granite head stone.

Had I acted earlier, the town might not be so dull today. I should have just gone on and flown over to London and learned the wax business while it was fresh on my mind. We could have had a hall of fame gallery for pumpers and roughnecks.

In other parts of the gallery, waxed herders could be dressed in their boots and hats, preserved for eternity. Several of the models could have been cast in a live state. As lethargic as coffee drinkers become I believe we could have run off 100 copies a day.

People rarely ask me whether I have any oil wells on the ranch. Now and then an Angelo banker may say, "Oh, you are the Noelke that's in the sheep business, aren't you?" I'm always real eager to agree. I think it's quite an accomplishment to be as old as I am and still be afloat in the ranching game. It takes a lot of cheek to ask for money to cover a bunch of old cows or old ewes .

I still haven't given up on the wax museum. Our dry winds would make a perfect oven perhaps a few copies of Billy the Kid might so for openers. It's a shame for such an opportunity to go untested, but until I stop feeding, I'm sure not going to bother them at the bank.